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Workers + warriors

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Introduction

Workers + Warriors

Black Acts and Arts of Radicalism, Revolution, and Resistance

Past, Present, and Future

Celeste-Marie Bernier and Nicole Willson

Lest We Forget: The Strength of Tears, The Fragility of Smiles, The Fierceness of Love, so reads the title of Betye Saar's powerful mixed-media assemblage she created as part of her *Workers + Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima* series exhibited over two decades ago in New York in 1998.¹ A triptych she constructed from historical washboards used by laboring African American women, enslaved and free, Saar's work bears witness to acts and arts of Black female radicalism as born not only of the body's physical endurance – and as communicated by centuries of domestic servitude during slavery and in a post-emancipation era – but of ongoing death-defying acts of spiritual resistance, creative revolution, and political activism. These recycled artifacts function as altars of worship and ancestral veneration in which she memorializes untold genealogies of Black women's lives. For Saar, the salvaged artifact of the disused washboard is integral to her protest aesthetic by providing “a format to depict the plight of slaves and their struggle to endure hard labor and lynchings.”² As she declares, “[b]y recycling them, I am honoring the memory of that labor and the working woman upon whose shoulders we now stand.”³ Simultaneously refusing to flinch from the white supremacist acts of death and destruction as

perpetuated against Black lives on a mass scale, and as a result not only of chattel slavery but of “hard labour and lynchings,” Saar’s vertical positioning of these washboards are visually evocative of grave markers in a cemetery. She exacerbates these traumatic associations by including a series of emotionally unequivocal phrases - “THE STRENGTH OF TEARS/ OF THOSE WHO TOILED,” “LEST WE FORGET / THE FRAGILITY OF SMILES/ OF STRANGERS LOST AT SEA” and “THE FIERCENESS OF LOVE/ EXTREME TIMES CALL FOR EXTREME HEROINES” – which she types onto the surface of her assemblages turned headstones where the names of individuals would typically appear. As a hard-hitting testament to lives as lived beyond the pale of official commemoration, Saar exposes the tragedies generated by those “who didn’t survive” no less than by those who did survive by any and every means necessary. As she bears witness in her rallying cry: “EXTREME TIMES CALL FOR EXTREME HEROINES.”

The horrifying realities of Black lives lost to history is reinforced not only by Saar’s inclusion of poetic text in her mixed-media assemblage but by her juxtaposition of three different images of Black womanhood which she inserts onto the battered surfaces of the washboards. For the first washboard, Saar reproduces a black and white photograph of a hunched over Black woman as she is bent over a sink and engaged in washing clothes. The especially worn surface of this recycled historical artifact ensures that her face is only partially visible. Here Saar does hard-hitting justice to missing histories of Black female labor in visceral as well as symbolic ways by suggesting a direct relationship between the surface of these damaged artifacts and the skin of wounded bodies. Regarding the second washboard, Saar returns viewers to the “slave ship imprint” by reproducing a cross-section of the *Brooks*, the eighteenth-century slave ship built in Liverpool, UK.⁴ A maritime vessel

that had a potent afterlife once its slaving days were finally over, diagrammatic renderings of the *Brooks* circulated in broadsides on both sides of the Atlantic to become an ur-image for suffering enslaved bodies within white abolitionist iconography. Saar's decision to insert this diagram onto the washboard whose metallic surface symbolizes the sea – and as such is a talismanic signifier of the Middle Passage – exposes the extent to which white philanthropic recreations of the *Brooks* exerted no small collateral damage by annihilating all trace of individualism in the interests of the antislavery cause. Black bodies appear as anything but human by circulating as barely decipherable and homogenous signs at best and as bodies of evidence and specimens of victimization at worst. As Frederick Douglass insisted all his life, his body and soul was bought and sold not only on the slaveholding auction block of the US South but on the abolitionist podium of the seemingly free North. No capitulator to white racism, he led an ongoing war against white activists who remained intent – all pretensions to social and moral reform to the contrary – on endorsing discriminatory and persecutory practices not only against himself but against all peoples of color. On the final washboard, Saar takes centuries long white racist discriminatory iconography to task by making the radical decision to include a grotesque caricature of Black womanhood. She inserts the racist figurine of the Aunt Jemima plantation stereotype as represented with a red-spotted bandana, enlarged eyes, reddened lips, and excessively blackened skin color. Ultimately refusing to capitulate to forces of white supremacy, however, Saar empowers her Black female subject by including a sticker on her dress as accompanied by the political slogan, “LIBERATE AUNT JEMIMA,” while she places a toy replica of an automatic rifle in her hands.

“I recycled derogatory images of Blacks and combined them with political slogans to reverse the negative connotations of racism,” Saar summarizes.⁵ She defines her early art-making processes in ways that are still relevant to her practice today by remaining in no doubt that, “slavery was declared illegal in 1862, but since then African Americans still ‘served’ in white homes in the form of images on cookie jars, dish towels and salt and pepper shakers, in addition to countless other household objects.”⁶ Coming to grips with these disturbing political legacies as visibilized in dominant material cultures in yet more revealing ways, she includes another assemblage in her *Workers + Warriors* series, *Call to Arms*, which she created in 1997.⁷ Here she juxtaposes a “Black collectible” grotesque figurine with emotionally powerful language in which she testifies to atrocities she chose not to graphically represent: “I’ve been victim The Belgians cut off my hands in the Congo They lynched me in Texas.” As a means to testify not only to unending cycles of white racism but to generations of Black resistance, she explicitly riffs off her decades’ earlier mixed-media work, *The Liberation of Aunt Jemima*, produced as early as 1972.⁸ Her Black figure is similarly accompanied not with one but multiple rifles, bullets, and holds her hands in the shape of clenched fists. For Saar, the manufacture, display, and sale of mass marketed “Aunt Jemima” figurines as cheap commodities “symbolizes the painful, ancestral memories of the Middle Passage, of slavery, of Jim Crow, of segregation, and of continuing racism.”⁹ Ultimately, *Workers + Warriors* signals the continuation of Saar’s life’s work of self-confessedly transforming “a demeaning mammy figure into an empowered warrior,” a practice she began decades previously in the wake of her “creative retaliation” inspired by the “murder of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.”¹⁰ A radical call to arms, Saar’s series lays bare her lifelong

commitment to visualizing untold stories of Black acts and arts of resistance, radicalism, and revolution against all the odds.

“‘Monday was wash day. Tuesday was ironing day. Wednesday was the day we delivered the clothes to the white people. Thursday was cleaning day. Friday was yard day. Saturday was grocery day. And on Sunday we all went to church.’”¹¹ So reads Bessie Harvey’s summary of her childhood upbringing in a rural US South in which she not only undertook hard labor in the service of whites but participated in familial domestic and religious rituals. As an artist who shared Saar’s determination to do powerful justice to hidden histories of Black women’s labor and to memorialize a Black collective fight for survival, she created her sculpture, *The First Washing Machine*, also titled *Monday*, in honor of “wash day,” as early as 1986.¹² As shown in this work, her anonymous Black woman wears a beautifully ornate, flower-patterned dress, and head wrap while she washes clothes in a silver bowl that Harvey has constructed from discarded foil packaging. As she testifies, the “first washing machine” can be found in no automated piece of equipment but in the back-breaking labor of Black women. As is customary across her sculptures, she constructs her female protagonist’s torso from minimally worked twigs with the result that she has only stumps for her hands and feet. While the washing line behind Harvey’s female laborer shows multi-colored and multi-patterned pants and dresses – most likely belonging to members of all ages within her own family – she includes only white items of clothing in her washing bowl and in the pot she positions over a fire. The stark contrast between the vividly colored clothing of these personal garments and the uniform whiteness of the items in her basket render it very likely that Harvey’s unnamed protagonist is fulfilling domestic duties by washing sheets for “white people.”

In this sculpture, Harvey works with valueless materials – silver foil, clothing scraps, and salvaged wood – to honor the lives of anonymous Black women who have labored not only within plantation slavery but who have and continue to be hired out to domestic service. For Harvey, the labor of the Black woman artist exists on a continuum with the labor of enslaved and free Black women. Choosing to sign her name in large letters on the base of the salvaged wooden board, she celebrates her own artistry at the same time that she testifies to the hidden histories of Black women's work. Dramatically to the fore in this sculpture is her conviction regarding the changing social and political contexts according to which “‘woman is lifted up high.’”¹³ “There was a time that a woman couldn't do the job you doin' now,” she informed one of her white interviewers, “Couldn't adopt a child if it wasn't a man. She couldn't even have credit without a man.”¹⁴ Ultimately, in her sculpture *The Hanging Tree*, Harvey like Saar celebrates radical feats of female resistance. These run a gamut from a Black woman's irrefutable ownership over her maternal rights on through to her right to profit from her own labor and artistry.

“Art was my savior. Art kept me from killing myself. My art was my new love affair. It was my retreatment to myself, not mistreating myself,” Lonnie Holley confides regarding his shared determination to create art as a space of salvation and survival.¹⁵ Across his mixed-media assemblages and installations, as for Betye Saar and Bessie Harvey so for Lonnie Holley: art-making is an act of creativity that operates as a bulwark not only against self-destruction but as a stimulus to self-respect, self-transformation, and self-examination. “[A]rt made you forget everything, and that's the fulfillment of life,” he insists, observing, “It takes you from one frame of thought, erases everything, and puts everything on hold and allow[s] you to successfully achieve your mission and do something else with the brain.”¹⁶ Serving

multiple functions as a safety-valve, a portal, and a conduit for public and private memories, histories, narratives, for Holley art-making guarantees the “fulfillment of life.” He develops his practice to find new ways to access social, political, cultural, emotional, intellectual, and imaginative freedoms that otherwise remain off-limits within a white racist imaginary. As an individual who was repeatedly incarcerated within a discriminatory judicial system, Holly turned to art-making as a life-saving strategy and as an escape from persecution. As he readily admits regarding a harrowing period of imprisonment he endured in Memphis, Tennessee, “In my cell I had started doing art out of pieces of old soap I found in the shower, and toilet paper, and straws from the broom that had got left in the cracks in the floor.”¹⁷ Sharing Bessie Harvey and Betye Saar’s practice of “making something out of nothing,” he relies on inventive aesthetic techniques to transform waste materials into allegorical and fantastical human and animal forms. As he confides, “I made faces and fishes and birds, anything I could design.”¹⁸ He takes pride in the instant approbation he received from his audiences by emphasizing, “The guard and the prisoners was saying, ‘Wow’, and listening to me because I was teaching them how to use their minds and their skills.”¹⁹ Over the decades, Holley retains his early commitment to the role of the artist as an educator as well as an oral historian and storyteller. Working to instill pride by succeeding in raising awareness among Black audiences regarding the value of “their minds and skills,” Holly’s artworks are a stimulus to dialogue and exchange and to initiate conversations. As an artist who lays bare centuries of Black resistance in his practices, he confides his conviction, “We was communicating.”²⁰

A breathtaking array of political, aesthetic, cultural, and imaginative acts and arts of resistance are endorsed not only by Lonnie Holley, Betye Saar, and Bessie

Harvey but by centuries of African diasporic artists, authors, and activists. Living and dying as “workers + warriors,” these women, children, and men, enslaved and free, are the focus for the contributors writing in this special issue as they each work to do justice to their revolutionary “call to arms.”²¹

* * * *

For this special issue, *Workers + Warriors: Black Acts and Arts of Radicalism, Revolution, and Resistance: Past, Present, and Future*, we bring together an array of interdisciplinary international scholars who are all working across the fields of Black Studies, African Diasporic Studies, Slavery Studies, American Studies, and Memory Studies, as they debate, destabilize, interrogate, and recreate existing methodologies within literary studies, memory studies, art history, visual culture, history, intellectual history, politics, sociology, and material and print cultures in order to do justice to the hidden histories, untold narratives, and buried memories of African diasporic freedom struggles over the centuries. This collection is the result of a symposium that was held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 2018 as part of our UK Arts and Humanities Research Council project, *Our Bondage and Our Freedom: Struggles for Liberty in the Lives and Works of Frederick Douglass and His Family (1818-1920)*.²² The inspiration for this project which we launched in 2018 on the two hundred-year anniversary of Frederick Douglass’s birth emerged from a determination to revisit his legendary life and pioneering works. A world-renowned freedom-fighter, inspirational social justice campaigner, mythologized liberator, exemplary philosopher, breathtaking orator, and beautiful writer, all his life Douglass fought for all freedoms by any and every means necessary. As he repeatedly

maintained in the motto he endorsed for his radical newspaper, *The North Star*, “Right is of no sex – Truth is of no color – God is the Father of us all, and we are brethren.”²³

Staggering to note, however, while Frederick Douglass was not only a famous figure in his own life-time but he endures to this day as a world-renowned icon, the political activism of his wife – Anna Murray Douglass (1813-1882) – and of his daughters and sons – Rosetta Douglass Sprague (1839-1906), Lewis Henry Douglass (1840-1908), Frederick Douglass Jr. (1842-1892), Charles Remond Douglass (1844-1920), and Annie Douglass (1849-1860) – has been subjected to widespread erasure, eradication, and annihilation within a mainstream imaginary.²⁴ While they were inspirational activists, reformers, historians, orators, literary writers, social commentators, and political theorists in their own right, they all lived lives that have remained biographically, socially, politically, culturally, historically, intellectually and philosophically off-limits. Dedicating their lives to creating an as yet unexamined archive, the powerful socio-political analysis and literary accomplishments displayed by their unexcavated writings and speeches testify to their commitment to a staggering array of reforms. Even a very brief glance into their biographies reveals that no topic was off-limits in their determination not only to combat the legal reality of US “chattel slavery” but also the survival of slavery’s “spirit” in a post-emancipation era that was a freedom in name only.

Among their many revolutionary accomplishments, all members of the Anna-Murray and Frederick Douglass family delivered speeches and wrote essays on women’s rights, discriminatory legislation, scientific racism, lynchlaw, prison reform, capital punishment, unfair housing, segregated schooling and prejudicial transportation networks. They wrote for and/or managed numerous newspapers while organizing and/or holding memberships of black literary societies, professional sports

leagues, Civil War veterans' organizations and national reform movements. As formally trained and self-taught as educators, typographers, printers, proof-readers, business correspondents, officer managers, seamstresses and domestic carers, Anna Murray, Rosetta, Lewis Henry, Frederick Jr., Charles Remond and Annie Douglass each contributed not only to Douglass' private life but to his public career as an activist, newspaper editor, orator, statesman, diplomat and author. On these grounds, it is no exaggeration to state that without the self-sacrificing heroism of Anna Murray, Rosetta, Lewis Henry, Frederick Jr., Charles Remond and Annie Douglass, there would be no Frederick Douglass.

Coming to grips with the narratives, poetry, speeches, songs, oral testimonies, correspondence, essays, photography, drawings, paintings, and sculptures produced by and/or representing Douglass and his family members, it becomes newly possible to do justice to the psychological, imaginative, and emotional realities of iconic and unknown Black lives as lived during slavery and on into a post-emancipation era. Coming together on the two hundred-year anniversary of Douglass's birth and in a Black lives Matter era there can be no doubt that the Douglass we need now is no representative self-made man but a fallible, mortal individual. The onus is on academics, archivists, artists and activists to harness every intellectual tool available in order to tell the story not only of the enslaved but of Black women and men experiencing freedoms that were in name only in a post-emancipation era. For Douglass' rallying cry, "My Bondage and My Freedom" it is possible to read: "Our Bondage and Our Freedom."²⁵

Yet more revealingly, the scholarly brilliance, intellectual range, political radicalism, and literary power in evidence across the bodies of work authored by Rosetta, Lewis, Charles, Frederick Jr. and Annie Douglass testify to the existence of a

previously unmapped history of African American literature and cultural production. As these researchers writing in this special issue and debating key strategies of Black arts and arts of radicalism, revolution, and resistance over the centuries confirm, the invisibilization of the Douglass family within the official archive betrays a stark reality: if the lives and works of the wife and children of the most renowned African American liberator are subjected to scholarly neglect, how much more must this be the fate suffered by untold millions living lives for whom no official records are extant. While Douglass maintained, “Genealogical trees do not flourish among slaves,” the extensive research into the lives and works of his wife as well as his daughters and sons confirms that familial patterns of influence and exchange have remained equally impossible to map for unimaginable numbers of Black women, men, and children fight for survival in the African diaspora.²⁶ On these grounds, and as we argue in this special issue, it is not only Frederick Douglass himself but the Anna Murray-Frederick Douglass family which present a revealing case study from which to develop an alternative methodology regarding unexamined Black acts and arts of self-expression. The aim of this special issue is to pioneer a cross, multi, and inter- disciplinary framework not only to recover but to work across an array of unexamined textual, visual and material cultures in order to do justice to Betye Saar’s conviction regarding the necessity of finding a new language in which to do justice to “The Strength of Tears, The Fragility of Smiles, The Fierceness of Love” as a bulwark against a terrible fate encapsulated in her warning “Lest We Forget.”

* * * *

The first section of this special issue focuses on key issues related to public history and opens with a powerful reassembling of the life of Frederick Douglass as both a private and public individual. Sir Godfrey Palmer OBE, a member of the Windrush generation and a professor in grain science who earned a personal chair at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh after establishing the International Centre for Brewing and Distilling, inaugurates the discussion and sets the radical political agenda that undergirds this essay collection. A pioneer, scholar and community activist, Palmer measures his own experiences, and the experiences of Windrush descendants in Edinburgh and beyond, against the fugitive and activist trials and triumphs of Frederick Douglass. Douglass's indomitable spirit, Palmer shows, resonates forcefully with the experiences of multitudes of oppressed, marginalized and insurgent women, children and men, and offers a blueprint for past, present and future activism.

This mindset is echoed by the archivists, curators and heritage specialists that work tirelessly to recover and reassemble the histories and cultures of individuals and communities across the Black Atlantic. Archivist, curator, historian and genealogist, Maya Davis's article represents an important scholarly intervention in studies of public history via her recognition of the incompleteness and systematic bias of white-authored historical records, which typically occlude the voices of Black people, enslaved and free. This was especially true, Davis shows, for Frederick Douglass, who was never able to access the ledger that contained the record of his date of birth that is now held by the Maryland State Archives. In this way, her article compellingly demonstrates the political tensions at work in seeking to recover such vital documents and establishes a model of collaborative and community-rooted activism that archives can seek to emulate in aspiring to recover Black histories. Compounding the importance of collaboration and specialist heritage understanding, Ka'mal McClarin

and Mike Antonioni offer unique curatorial insights into the history and memory of Cedar Hill, the house that Frederick and Anna Murray Douglass made their home between 1878 until her death in 1882 and his final passing in 1895. As an inspirational and emotionally and politically charged space of knowledge-accumulation and curiosity for the Douglass family, Cedar Hill is a testament to the educational barriers that Douglass in particular overcame in forging his freedom, but, as McClarin and Antonioni underscore, it is also a monument to the everyday: to the domestic lives, social pursuits and habitual enjoyments of Frederick Douglass, his family and their wider social circle. In this way, this article acknowledges that the reassembly and recuperation of Frederick Douglass can only faithfully be achieved through a holistic understanding of his public *and* private worlds.

An inspirational example of a meticulous localized study of African diasporic lives, Lisa Williams of the Edinburgh Caribbean Association provides an in-depth historical account of the Caribbean connections of Edinburgh. As Williams demonstrates, Edinburgh is a city which was buttressed by the exploitation of colonial Caribbean enslaved labor. However, while the advancement of Edinburgh's cityscape was made possible through the pernicious profits of absentee white planters, Williams demonstrates, through a series of unique case studies, the revolutionary ways in which African Caribbean lives enriched the city's culture. In this way, she showcases how Black women, children, and men have left indelible traces that African Caribbean community groups such as the Edinburgh Caribbean Association are striving to recuperate and preserve in the present. Also working with methodologies rooted in local history, Nick Batho's article presents rich insights into Frederick Douglass's movements across Scotland and illuminates the breadth of his transnational activist networks, which transcended racial, geographical and class divides. His essay also

provides a unique overview of the possibilities for recovering and archiving these movements through digital mapping initiatives and through collaborative multimedia, archival and curatorial endeavors. He thereby demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary and multimedia apparatuses in helping to fill the gaps that pervade the archive of slavery and archives of Black history more broadly.

The second section, “Art and the Radical Imaginary,” explores the transformative and insurgent possibilities of art and art-making across the Black Atlantic. Diane Fujino’s article offers an anatomical exploration of the fugitive Pan-Africanist art of Akinsanya Kambon and demonstrates in rich detail how his activism infused his artistic practice. Especially valent is the idea that Kambon’s art represents a kind of *marronage*, which situates it resolutely within an African diasporic tradition of creativity and ingenuity as strategic and cultural resistance. By looking at the full trajectory of Kambon’s artistic activity, Fujino’s article also acknowledges how his process has evolved across various awakenings, envisioning how diasporic pasts could inform diasporic futures through acts of learning, reclamation and reinvention. Hannah Jeffrey’s article builds on this proposition in illuminating ways. Through her innovative exploration of murals as an expressive medium, she demonstrates how African American communities that have been systematically deprived of conventional platforms for articulating their personal histories of struggle and survival have harnessed dynamic forms of creativity to shape, disseminate and preserve a collective radical imaginary. While murals are in this way embedded with a transgenerational and diasporic poetics, they are also highly localized, and speak to the specific concerns of the community in a given time and place.

Sequoia D. Barnes’s article examines the designer Patrick Kelly’s ‘Mississippi Lisa’ t-shirt designs from his spring/summer 1988 ready-to-wear collection inspired

by the Mona Lisa. Exploring the myriad ways in which Kelly's designs invoke and re-appropriate caricatured and hyperbolized images of Black people from the age of slavery to the present, she presents Kelly's vision as bathetic and subversive, especially in his creative engagement with and re-articulation of the trope of the 'mammy'. His work is thus situated within a radically countercultural Black Atlantic tradition that fuses Black diasporic artistic praxis with an effort to reclaim and reconstitute violently distorted histories and cultures. Building on this theme, Alan Rice's article powerfully elucidates how the artist and activist Jade Montserrat 'makes the past present' by re-envisioning landscapes that have historically denied and occluded Black presences. The unmaking and reassembly of historical metanarratives through artistic invention is shown to be vital to ensuring the transferrable legacies of Black histories, and especially Black British histories which are so often de-centred and de-contextualized from British history at large and the landscapes that Britain's island geography recall. Through her 'guerrilla energy', Rice shows, Montserrat radically reinserts herself within the historical frame, thereby 'opening up that space to other images and voices' and implicating the colonialist infrastructures that would seek to deny, obstruct and silence those voices.

The third section on "Theorizing Representation" examines how African Atlantic communities have devised strategies of survival, subterfuge, endurance and resistance to physical and ideological assaults on their personhood, through philosophy, scholarship and intellectual enquiry. Civil Rights lawyer, scholar, and activist, Ernest Quarles's article represents a vitally intersectional intervention in African American cultural philosophy that looks beyond the text and beyond the lauded public figure in a determination to reclaim the numerous and nameless women who are so often occluded by the literary archive. In teasing out the historical

connections between African American women activists such as Anna Murray Douglass, Anna Julia Cooper, and Angela Davis, he powerfully demonstrates the vitality of the political, educational and emotional labor undertaken by women of color across the African diaspora in the ongoing struggle for equality and social justice.

Barbara Tomlinson's perceptively penetrating examination into theories of intersectionality – a concept conceived and amplified by women scholars of color in the United States – interrogates the ways that the concept has been misinterpreted and misapplied by European scholars. Such 'misreadings', Tomlinson argues, impede struggles for liberation and prolong colonialist mentalities, thus demanding continuous and Herculean feats of critical and ideological resistance from scholars of color. Reaching further back into the long history of African American thought, Amy Cools's article offers a rare glimpse into the philosophy of James McCune Smith, which, she argues, anticipated African American cultural predominance and imagined possibilities for the expansion of interracial and intercultural connections in the United States. Though writing over one hundred years prior to Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and other intersectional theorists, Smith foregrounded the importance, Cools shows, of creating frameworks of understanding heavily informed by Black experiences. In this way, hope and uplift are registered as important mechanisms for preserving African Atlantic culture and resisting the colonialist violence of the archive and the colonialist histories that emerged thereof.

The inspiration for twentieth-century activist-artist Jacob Lawrence's multi-part narrative series, *Frederick Douglass* (1938-39), a 32 panel work he painted while he was living in Harlem, emerged from his exposure to the stories of "strong, daring and heroic black heroes and heroines" and is the focus of Celeste-Marie Bernier's

article. As she argues, whereas it had been an act of philosophical and political liberation for Frederick Douglass to focus upon the “multitudinous” possibilities of textual experimentation and visual reimagining when it came to his own face and body, let alone his life story and his intellectual and moral power as an orator and author, for social justice artists such as Jacob Lawrence who were building new languages of liberation from his activism and authorship, it was imperative that he become a point of origin, a Founding Father in a Black revolutionary tradition, and a steadying compass point for acts of radicalism, reform, and resistance in the African Atlantic world.

The fourth section foregrounds acts of witnessing and testimony in remembering, rehabilitating and preserving the legacy of Black lives. Nicole Willson’s article examines the forgotten history of the *Chasseurs Volontaires de Saint-Domingue* – a legion of soldiers who fought in the Siege of Savannah composed predominantly of free men of color from the French colony of Saint Domingue (which, after a violent anticolonial revolution, became the first independent Black republic that we know today as Haiti). She shows that while most popular historical accounts of the American War of Independence marginalize the contributions of the *Chasseurs*, scholars, artists and activists across the African diaspora have sought to reassemble the fragments of their forgotten legacy. In this way, it stresses the importance of building historical narratives that incorporate voices that the historical canon typically occludes and using creative and engaging strategies for their dissemination. Paul Young’s article likewise expounds the need to peel back the veneer of what is known and accepted as ‘authentic’ truth in order to expose the diverse and myriad layers of Black lives. Focusing in on the life of poet, novelist and playwright Paul Laurence Dunbar, Young shows ‘that Dunbar’s multiplicity

encompasses no binary of true/false or public/private, but exists as a self-consciously cultivated, multiple and evasive array of biographical self(s)'. Drawing on photography and letters from the archive of Maud Clark, he assembles divergent forms of testimony to present new, imaginative and boundary-pushing possibilities for re-reading and re-interpreting Dunbar.

Kiefer Holland's article explores in minute literary-analytical detail the authorial tensions embedded in fugitive from slavery Josiah Henson's two autobiographies, *Life* and *Truth*. While both narratives were purportedly transcribed by a white amanuensis, Holland envisions alternative authorial possibilities that the white-dominated literary record refuses to entertain. Through linguistic analysis and the careful chronologization of Henson's life, his article works to validate Henson's authorial testimony – especially in *Truth* – and de-center the privileged figure of the white editor/benefactor as the vector for antislavery literature and antislavery activism more broadly.

Finally, in an act of willful defiance against colonialist ideologies, Esther Lezra's article engages imaginatively with creative and transcendent acts of witnessing located within the archive of Black freedom. As a register of the unarticulated and unspeakable pain of a community that bears the transgenerational scars of historic injustices, sounds, words and imaginaries are shown to converge to form testimonies that bear witness to, and combat the violence of, the colonial archive, which 'tirelessly works to demonize the people whose labor, suffering, sweat and blood built the structures and infrastructures of the modern world'. Collective memory is thus imagined as a route to cultural survival. In this way, Lezra's article acts as a rallying cry that encourages scholars to reassemble scattered fragments, and to attune their senses to the cadences and frequencies of the divergent forms of

testimony that operate on the margins of the dominant, colonialist and white supremacist metanarrative.

* * * *

The Cornfield (When They Didn't Have Their Freedom) is an emotionally unequivocal painting contemporary artist Thornton Dial created in 1990 and in which he narrates a lived history in slavery only to imagine a future life in freedom.²⁷ Working with an expressionist landscape in which the corn field comes to life via swirling shades of blue, brown, and white color, Dial offsets the entrapment of his central Black figure as pinned between two monumental sized plants with the enlarged silhouette of a bird flying free in the sky. Here he provides a visual endorsement of centuries of Black people working for their survival through untold acts and unmemorialized arts of self-emancipation. "Black folks know what they got to do to live, and they will do it, they will work hard as they know how, as hard as the next man, by the sweat of their own brow," he emphasizes.²⁸ As Dial urges, "They want to have their own strategy for working, to use their own energy and spirit the way it come to them to do it, not something because someone else make you do it. That's freedom."²⁹ A revolutionary and radical artist who passed away as recently as 2016, Dial dedicated his practice to developing his "own strategy" as he worked to formulate an alternative visual language in which to do justice to his "energy and spirit." Ever a self-reflexive experimenter, he betrayed his lifelong conviction that, "My art is the evidence of my freedom."³⁰

“I was doing some drawing recently about the Negro and the history, about slavery, about the families, about how we come to be in the United States, and about the future for everybody. I was drawing about the coal mines and the ore mines, about mules and horses,” Dial summarized.³¹ Creating his epic-scale painting, *How a Man Been Down* also in 1990, he foregrounds his commitment to “the Negro and the history.”³² This mixed-media work comes to life via textured hues of purple, red, yellow, blue, brown, and white color. He generates emotive visual drama by painting multiple contorted faces in various stages of psychological torment. Disembodied and disconnected, they free-fall within swirling shapes of cacophonous color as interwoven with layered strands of industrial rope to shore up his testament to Black struggles to break free. “‘This is how life used to be, the man under the mule. The mule was treated better than black folks. White folks had this song, ‘Kill a nigger, hire another. Kill a mule, buy another,’” he insists. He bears witness to a traumatizing reality by confiding, “It was a terrible life to live at that time.”³³

In the same year Dial painted a no less powerful work he titled, *Running with the Mule, Running for Freedom* in which he again provides haunting close ups of emotionally contorted faces as positioned in close proximity to his abstract-figurative reimagining of a mule. “I have seen the Negro next to the mule, used like a farm animal at that time. I seen cruel things like that,” Dial observes, poignantly urging, “A grown man should have not been handicapped that way. He should be able to fight for his freedom to say, ‘Yes, I will do because I want to do.’”³⁴ While living and working centuries apart, Thornton Dial no less than Betye Saar, Bessie Harvey, Lonnie Holley, and the Anna-Murray-Frederick Douglass family all testify to the conviction of the contributors mapping hidden histories of individual and collective fights for liberty, “All people want freedom and run for it.”³⁵

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Notes

¹ Betye Saar, *Betye Saar: Workers + Warriors: The Return of Aunt Jemima* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1999), 22. A full color reproduction of this work can be found here: <http://www.artnews.com/2017/06/12/betye-saar-at-craft-folk-art-museum-los-angeles/>

² Qtd. in Leslie King-Hammond, “Bitter Sweets: Considering the *Colored* Rainbow Universe of Betye Saar” in King Hammond, *Betye Saar: Colored - Consider the Rainbow* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2002), 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ For further information on Betye Saar's construction of the "slave ship imprint," see Celeste-Marie Bernier, "'The Slave Ship Imprint': Representing the Body, Memory, and History in Contemporary African American and Black British Painting, Photography, and Installation Art," *Callaloo* 37, no. 4 (2014): 990-1022.

⁵ Qtd. in King-Hammond, "Bitter Sweets," 7.

⁶ Betye Saar, "Artist Statement." In *Betye Saar In Service: A Version of Survival* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 2000), 3.

⁷ For further information, see the catalog by Arlene Raven titled, *Betye Saar: Workers + Warriors, The Return of Aunt Jemima* (New York: Michael Rosenfeld Gallery, 1998). Various installation views of Saar's series can be viewed online here: <https://www.michaelrosenfeldart.com/exhibitions/betye-saar-workers-and-warriors-the-return-of-aunt-jemima>

⁸ A full color reproduction of this work can be viewed here: <http://revolution.berkeley.edu/liberation-aunt-jemima/>

⁹ Barbara Isenberg, "Betye Saar." In Barbara Isenberg, *State of the Arts California Artists Talk about their Work* (New York: W. Morrow, 2000), 278.

¹⁰ Betye Saar, "Redtime Est," is accessible online at: <http://www.michaelrosenfeldart.com/exhibitions/redtime-est-an-installation-by-betye-saar>

¹¹ Bessie Harvey as interviewed by Stephen C. Wicks and quoted in "Revelations in Wood: The Art of Bessie Harvey" in his volume, *Awakening the Spirits: Art by Bessie Harvey* (Knoxville: Knoxville Museum of Art, 1997), 14.

¹² A full color reproduction of this work can be viewed here: <https://www.pinterest.com/pin/19281104627303503/>

¹³ Qtd. in Wicks in "Revelations in Wood," 22.

¹⁴ Lonnie Holley, “Blackbirds by Lonnie Holley as told to Theodore Rosengarten,” in Mark Sloan, ed., *Something To Take My Place: The Art of Lonnie Holley* (Charleston, South Carolina: Halsey Institute of Contemporary Art, 2015), 203.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Lonnie Holley, “The Best that Almost Happened.” In William and Paul Arnett et al eds., *Souls Grown Deep: African American Vernacular Art*. Volume Two (Atlanta: Tinwood Books, 2001), 538-83. Available online: <http://soulsgrowndeep.org/artist/lonnie-holley>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ For a history of African American and Black British artists see Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Stick to the Skin: African American and Black British Art (1965-2015)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

²² For further information about the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council project, “Our Bondage and Our Freedom,” see the following website:
<https://ourbondageourfreedom.llc.ed.ac.uk> For access to the 2018 *Strike for Freedom Frederick Douglass* exhibition at the National Library of Scotland see the following link: <https://www.nls.uk/exhibitions/treasures/frederick-douglass>

For access to the digital maps of the African American freedom trails of Edinburgh and Scotland see the following online resource:

<https://ourbondageourfreedom.llc.ed.ac.uk/maps/>

²³ Frederick Douglass’s newspaper, *The North Star*, ran between 1847 until 1851 when he gave it the new name *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*.

²⁴ For further information on the Anna-Murray and Frederick Douglass family, see the following publications: Celeste-Marie Bernier and Andrew Taylor, *If I Survive: Frederick Douglass and Family in the Walter O. and Linda Evans Collection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018); Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Living Parchments: Artistry and Authorship in the Life and Works of Frederick Douglass* (forthcoming Yale University Press) and *The Anna-Murray and Frederick Douglass Family Writings*, a three volume work consisting of a standalone biography and annotated transcriptions of the family's published and unpublished works (forthcoming Edinburgh University Press).

²⁵ "My Bondage and My Freedom" is the title of Frederick Douglass' second autobiography. For further information, see Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, edited by Celeste-Marie Bernier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

²⁶ Ibid., 38.

²⁷ Dial's work is reproduced in Thornton Dial, *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World* (New York: Southern Queens Park Association, Inc., 1990), 5.

²⁸ Thornton Dial, "Mr. Dial is a Man Looking for Something," in Arnett and Arnett et al eds., *Souls Grown Deep*, Volume 2, 201.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 196.

³² Ibid.

³³ Paul Arnett, "The Strategy of Thornton Dial," in *Thornton Dial: Strategy of the World*, 19.

³⁴ Thornton Dial, "Mr. Dial is a Man Looking for Something," in Arnett and Arnett et al eds., *Souls Grown Deep*, Volume 2, 200-201.

³⁵ Arnett, "Strategy," 19.